

MODEL 1: CHARACTER MOTIVATION

These two excerpts come from a story about a girl's initiation into a sorority. Why does Millicent want to join the exclusive club?

from **INITIATION**

Short story by **Sylvia Plath**

What girl would not want to be one of the elect, no matter if it did mean five days of initiation before and after school, ending in the climax of Rat Court on Friday night when they made the new girls members? Even Tracy had been wistful when she heard that Millicent had been one of the five girls to receive an invitation.

"It won't be any different with us, Tracy," Millicent had told her. "We'll still go around together like we always have, and next year you'll surely get in."

"I know, but even so," Tracy had said quietly, "you'll change, whether you think you will or not. Nothing ever stays the same."

And nothing does, Millicent had thought. How horrible it would be if one never changed . . . if she were condemned to be the plain, shy Millicent of a few years back for the rest of her life.

Close Read

1. The boxed text reveals how difficult it is to get into the sorority. Find another place that explains Millicent's more personal reason for wanting to belong.
2. What does Millicent's desire to join the sorority reveal about her?

MODEL 2: CHARACTER CHANGE

Now read to see how Millicent changes by the end of the story.

As part of her initiation, Millicent has had to ask strangers on a bus what they had for breakfast. One man answered cheerfully, "Heather birds' eyebrows on toast." His unusual response helped Millicent put the experience in perspective.

Outside, the sparrows were still chirping, and as she lay in bed Millicent visualized them, pale gray-brown birds in a flock, one like the other, all exactly alike.

And then, for some reason, Millicent thought of the heather birds. Swooping carefree over the moors, they would go singing and crying out across the great spaces of air, dipping and darting, strong and proud in their freedom and their sometime loneliness. It was then that she made her decision.

Seated now on the woodpile in Betsy Johnson's cellar, Millicent knew that she had come triumphant through the trial of fire, the searing period of the ego which could end in two kinds of victory for her. The easiest of which would be her coronation as a princess, labeling her conclusively as one of the select flock.

The other victory would be much harder, but she knew that it was what she wanted. It was not that she was being noble or anything. It was just that she had learned there were other ways of getting into the great hall, blazing with lights, of people and of life.

Close Read

1. How has Millicent changed since the beginning of the story? Explain whether her change is external or internal.
2. What insight does Millicent gain? Cite details to support your answer.